

FROM ORAL TRADITION TO WRITTEN RECORD IN ARABIC GENEALOGY

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The great genealogical work the *Ġamharat al-nasab* of Hišām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī (d.c. 204/819) marks the completion of the codification of Arabic genealogies and forms the basis of most later work¹. This vast compilation has no parallel in other cultures. The aristocratic families of Western Europe certainly produced elaborate genealogies, sometimes tracing their ancestry back to the Trojans or other figures of classical antiquity. Such genealogies often included collateral branches as well and were not simply the direct stem of the leading branch. The Arabic genealogies, as recorded by Ibn al-Kalbī, remain, however, in a class of their own. In part this is because of the sheer size of the material. The Register of the *Ġamharat al-nasab* contains some 35,000 names, all of people, real and imaginary, most of whom died before the end of the first century *hiġrī*. No other genealogies can produce an onomasticon on this scale.

The second distinguishing feature is that this compilation attempts to provide the paternal lineages of an entire nation. True, there were many people in Arabia who do not appear, Christian townsmen from Naġrān, Persians settled in Ṣan‘ā’ would presumably not count, nor, from the post-conquest era, would settled Arabic speakers in Syria or Iraq, but the aim seems to have been to provide as complete account as possible of at least the most important lineages of all the Arab tribes. Written genealogies from other cultures tend to concentrate on the distinguished ancestry of one family or group rather than attempting to portray the structure of a whole nation.

Both in size and scope, the written genealogies of Ibn al-Kalbī are

¹ I have used the tabulated edition by W. Caskel, *Ġamharat al-nasab: das genealogische Werk des Hišām ibn Muḥammad al-Kalbī*, 2 vols., Leiden, 1966, which has an extremely valuable introduction.

unique. The purpose of this paper is to examine how they compare with what we know of Arab oral genealogies and to determine in what ways, if at all, they are different. In this way, we will be able to shed some light on the question of the relationship between oral tradition and written record in early Islam. To do this, I intend to examine the evidence about how bedouin tribesmen of the twentieth century remember and record their genealogies. In doing so I realise I am making a major methodological assumption: I am assuming that the bedouin Arabs of early Islamic times remembered their genealogies in more or less the same way as modern bedouin do. Clearly they did not remember the same genealogies, since these are peculiar to the tribe and the circumstance, but it seems likely that they structure their genealogical view along the same lines. This methodology is certainly open to challenge but it does provide a suitable bases for investigation.

The classic examination of a bedouin tribe remains A. Musil's *The Manners and Customs of the Ruwāla Bedouins*, first published in 1928 but reflecting bedouin society as it existed before the First World War². In Musil's account, the Ruwāla have a general conception of large scale genealogy. They know that the Ruwāla are part of the great 'Anaza confederation and assume that they have a common ancestor. This makes any other member of an 'Anaza tribe their "*ibn 'amm*". In practice however, the knowledge of the individual tribesmen is focussed on the micro-genealogy of his own three generation *ibn 'amm*. This unit (known variously as *fahd*, *hamūla* or *hams* among different tribes) are the descendents of a common great-grandfather and form the framework of everyday life for the bedouin in almost all the examples described. Within the limited compass of this kinship group all the relationships are well known. Beyond this however, the connections dry up. The bedouin do not have lengthy genealogies which relate their micro-genealogy to the original stem of the Ruwāla. As Musil says, "Every bedouin knows his great-grandfather, whereas of his great-great-grandfather he is likely to be completely ignorant"³. This works both up and down; defining a man's kin (*ahl*), Musil remarks, "It comprises his descendants to the third generation—that is, his sons, grandsons and great-grandsons. It also includes his ascendants to the third genera-

² A. Musil, *The Manners and Customs of the Ruwāla Bedouins*, American Geographical Society: Oriental Explorations and Studies No. 6, New York, 1928. For the discussion of genealogy see pp. 45-50.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

tion—that is, father, grandfather and great-grandfather—and descendants of these ascendants to the third generation from each. Descent is reckoned (sic) in male lines only. Second cousins are the most remote collaterals that may belong to one's kin"⁴. The kin are the ones who will protect you: in the pre-state world on the Ruwāla, the kin are essential for survival.

How the relationship between the *faḥḍ*, unit and the tribe (*qabīla*) or (*aṣīra*) is conceived by the Ruwāla is not clear from Musil. The relationship claims to be biological but is never specified. Although it is known which tribes are part of 'Anaza, no effort is made to find the missing links which would bind the whole structure together. It is possible for chiefs to offer blood-kinship to non-related groups, although Musil says that such groups always retain their separate identity. However, it is most probable that if such an arrangement endured, that the next generation of the incomers would be assigned a place in the host tribe's genealogy.

The Ruwāla have been visited much more recently, in the 1970s, by the Lancasters⁵. They devote more attention than Musil did to the questions of genealogy and how this is conceived. At the macro-genealogical level, the Ruwāla contrast the 'Anaza with the Banū Ṣaḥr or the Ṣammar but no genealogical relationship is suggested between them, that is that no common "ancestor" is found for them. Furthermore, these large units have no physical reality. The entire tribe has no single shaykh and never gathers together for war or any other purpose. Within the 'Anaza, the sub-tribes, of which the Ruwāla are one, are assigned a genealogical relationship⁶. They are spoken of as "near" or "far" depending from the speaker's own group depending on the degree of cooperation and intermarriage. The eponyms of the groups, like Ruwāla are not held to have been real people but there is nonetheless a tendency to speak of the groups and to define their relationships with each other as if they were a kin.

At the level of the tribe and large subdivisions, the relationships are more or less fixed. At a lower level however, within the sub-groups of Ruwāla, there is a tendency for the genealogies to be made on a "must

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁵ W. Lancaster, *The Ruwala Bedouin Today*, Cambridge, 1981. For the main discussion of kinship and genealogy see pp. 24-35 though these issues are discussed all through the work.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

have been" basis⁷. That is to say that if one group intermarries with another group but not with a third, this shows that their ancestors "must have been" more closely related. This can be applied to political and commercial relationships as well. In this way the genealogy of sub-groups of the tribe, forms itself according to the needs and alliances of the moment: the social relationships, in fact, create the genealogy, and not, as at first appears, the other way round. This concept of the "generative genealogy" is very important in understanding both written and oral genealogies.

As in Musil's time, it is only at the level of the *fahd* that the genealogy is fully known and everyone's place in it identified. Between this known, biological micro-genealogy and the larger scale genealogies of tribe and sub-tribe there is no direct link, nor are people in one *fahd* group aware of the exact relationships in others. For purposes of working together, and, in the old days, of defence, three generation *fuhūd* were grouped together in five generation groups, that is people who are held to share the same great-great-great-grandfather. This might be thought to negate Musil's law, stated above, that the bedouin only know their great-grandfathers. In fact it does not, for it can be shown that this five generation group is a constructed genealogy which may have a biological basis but equally may not. It presents itself in terms of a patrilineal genealogy but it is in fact bound together by shared interests and intermarriage. Striking evidence of this can be found in a comparison between the list of five generation groups collected by Musil in 1914 and Lancaster in 1973. If these reflected a biological reality, at least two generations would have past and the names of the first progenitors of the groups would have changed. In fact, the vast proportion of the groups bore the same founders name in 1973 as they had in 1914 meaning that the eponymous ancestor of the group is either more than five generations back, or that he is a figure constructed to give a genealogical unity to a group which comes together for other reasons.

The only exception to this rule is found in the case of the shaykhly kin of Ša'lān. Here the knowledge of genealogy is essential for political reasons. In this case the real genealogy is known for some fifteen generations and Lancaster was able to reconstruct an extensive family tree. He was helped in his research by one Freiwan. Freiwan was by this time about seventy five years old and came from a section of the

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-3.

Ša'lān called the Muwassirīn who did not themselves produce the shaykhs. Although the younger generations of the Muwassirīn had come to think of themselves as a separate group, old Freiwan still considered himself Ša'lān. "Freiwan" writes Lancaster, "is a recognised authority on genealogical matters. . . . Much of Freiwan's social, political and economic life took place among the members of the Sha'lan and his political influence inside the Murath (the larger section to which the Sha'lan belong) came from this association and his skill as a mediator, this skill depended on, and developed from, an encyclopaedic knowledge of political history expressed in genealogical terms"⁸. A few points are worth stressing here, the Ša'lān genealogy is remembered because they are the shaykhly family and their actions have a political importance for the whole tribe. Secondly they need specialists to inform them and keep them right about their genealogy and, furthermore, these specialists acquire status and position because of their genealogical expertise. Finally, even the Ša'lān genealogy only stretches back fifteen generations (and much of that only gives a single name in each generation, with no collaterals), approximately to the time when they first took over the position of shaykh; before then, their genealogy was presumably as obscure as that of any other *fuhūd*.

The question of shaykhly genealogies was investigated in depth by Max von Oppenheim in his great series of volumes *Die Beduinen*⁹. Von Oppenheim was not a social anthropologist in the sense that the term would be used nowadays but was interested in the history and present divisions of the bedouin. Like Musil, most of his information was collected in the last days of bedouin independence before the First World War when raiding and warfare were still very much part of bedouin life. He worked out structures for the main bedouin groups and their subdivisions. He too produced a family tree for the Ša'lān shaykhs of Ruwāla which corresponds in its basic outline to Lancaster's¹⁰ as well as family trees for most of the other shaykhly families of the Syrian and North Arabian bedouin. Von Oppenheim's approach is essentially that of a historian and he supplements the Arabs' own view of their genealogies with historical material from other sources, both Arabic chroniclers and European travellers so it is often difficult to discover the tribesmen's own oral genealogies. However he does quote oral sources

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 27-8.

⁹ M. von Oppenheim, *Die Beduinen*, Leipzig, 1939.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p. 106.

for macro-genealogies (e.g. the main 'Anaza tree¹¹ which is recorded as having been passed on Medjhem b. Muhed on 19, 5, 1913, but is supplemented by information from Doughty, Musil *et al.*). In the case of the genealogy of the Bayt Muḥammad of Šammar, he quotes one 'Aqil b. 'Abd al-'Azīz who remembered his descent, rightly or wrongly, for seventeen generations¹². In general, the picture Von Oppenheim presents is compatible with the information in Musil and Lancaster, i.e. that macro-genealogies of the tribe and the line of the shaykhly house are preserved but not those of less important *fuḥūd* and that even the shaykhly genealogy does not connect directly with the eponymous father of the tribe.

Von Oppenheim was essentially concerned with important, political genealogies. A more humble perspective can be found in Jaussen, *Coutumes des Arabes au Pays de Moab*¹³ published in 1948 but based on research done in 1902 and 1905, Jaussen collected information from a variety of tribes¹⁴. It was claimed that all members of a tribe were descended from a common ancestor whose name they took. He does not record any over-arching macro-genealogy to link the various tribes in the area he investigated. He is particularly interesting on tribesmen's ideas about the eponymous founders of their tribe. Clearly many of the bedouin found themselves with a name they had great difficulty in explaining¹⁵. The Banū Ṣaḥr for example had two quite different origin myths, both equally problematic. In one they emerged from a rock (Ar. Ṣaḥr) which was still shown in the Balqā'. According to the other they were the descendants of one Ṭuwayq, a foundling who was brought up by a man called Dahāmiš also known as Ṣaḥr, whose daughter he married and from whom the Banū Ṣaḥr are descended: why they are not called the Banū Ṭuwayq, Arab descent being strictly patrilineal, is by no means clear.

Other tribal names presented similar problems. Ḥuwaytāt equally had two stories, one is clearly etymologically based and holds that the eponymous Ḥuwaytāt was so called because he confined his brother in a walled enclosure (*ḥā'it*). A more ambitious legend has Ḥuwayt as a son of Ham son of Noah, 'Anaza, eponym of the great confederation

¹¹ *Ibid.*, I, p. 113.

¹² *Ibid.*, I, p. 152.

¹³ A. Jaussen, *Coutumes des Arabes au Pays de Moab*, Paris, 1948.

¹⁴ For a convenient list of the tribes *ibid.*, pp. 391-415. Among the many merits of Jaussen's work is that he provides the Arabic spelling of proper names.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-112.

of that name, was originally called Findī but was known as ‘Anaza, because he was brought up by a goat (Ar. *‘anz*), clearly another etymologically inspired myth. The Sirhān, by contrast, only claim that their ancestor looked like a wolf (Ar. *sirhān*). The Šarāra were generally considered a low status vagabond tribe and the myths foisted upon them reflect this. In one Šarārī was an artisan in the service of the Banū Hilāl (i.e. not a noble Arab) who met a girl one day in the desert and, forgetting his master and his old position, set off on a life of wandering. In another the mother of the eponymous Šarār died in childbirth and he was raised by a dog! In both these cases the myths reflect on the supposed character of the tribe. Jaussen also records one case of what looks like straight ancestor worship. The Aḡārima are descended from one Šubāḥ who came from the east and settled near Ḥisbān. The tribe is named after his bravest son Aḡram. Every year they gather at the tomb of Šubāḥ where a camel is sacrificed, the meat given to the poor and the blood used to die the tent of the man who provided the sacrifice¹⁶.

Most of the groups investigated by Jaussen were fragmented groups of semi-settled bedouin from lower status tribes or sections. They seem to have thought of themselves as isolated groups and to have no conception of their place in an overall genealogical scheme, in the way in which the Ruwāla, for example, felt that they were part of ‘Anaza and opposed to Šammar and the Banū Ṣaḥr.

The Arabs of Moab were fully aware that tribes could be formed and changed by non-biological means. Jaussen was told of one Abū Ṭaya of the Ḥuwayṭāt who became irritated with his shaykh and split off to form a new group. Despite the summons of their old chiefs the dissidents stuck with Abū Ṭaya and the new tribe became feared raiders from Kerak to the Euphrates. Quṭṭān b. Ḥāmid, a renowned warrior, gathered a large following from Ṣaḥr, Ḥamāyida and Šarāra and would have constituted a new tribe had he not been killed prematurely. At a lower level it was entirely possible for people to be incorporated in a tribe with the consent of a shaykh, they would agree to be part of the host tribe “*damawī wa samawī*” (in blood and name) and would no doubt find a place in their adopted genealogy¹⁷.

The real unit of association in all these tribes was the three generation group, commonly known here as the *ḥamūla*, and it was within

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-5.

these groups that the genealogy was well-known. The role of the shaykh of the tribe (*ʿašīra*) was only in evidence when it came to relations with the government and he owed such status as he had to his role as intermediary between government and tribesmen.

The research for E. Marx's *Bedouin of the Negev*¹⁸ was conducted in the 1950s. Here there are five main tribes, incidentally the same five who were listed in the same area by Jaussen. Marx does not discuss the tribesmen's concepts of their genealogy in detail, although he does note that they say they are descended from the ancient Arabs and hold the land by right of conquest, but like the other authorities he insists that the small "co-liable group" (*ḥams* or *faḥḍ*) is the real unit to which they relate. In this case the members of the group claim a common ancestor five generations back. In Marx's examples, many of these bedouin groups also have *fallāḥīn* attached to them who claim a more distant common ancestor, "perhaps a son of the tribe's founding ancestor, whose name was lost in the passage of time"¹⁹. This hypothetical ancestor explains their relationship with the bedouin group.

Once again we see that outside authorities work through the shaykhs and give the tribal organization a structure it would otherwise lack. In 1856 the Turks agreed that the Ḥullām should pay taxes directly and not through the shaykhs of the Tiyāhā tribe and this move marked the acceptance of Ḥullām as a separate tribe (*ʿašīra*). Equally, the Israeli administration registered the tribes and sub-tribes (*rubūʿ*) shortly after 1950 and since then the evolution has become fossilised so that none of the *rubūʿ* can now become independent tribes²⁰.

My last example is taken from a very different world from the semi-sedentarised bedouin of Moab and the Negev. The Al-Murra live in central Arabia on the northern fringes of the Empty Quarter. In the title of his book, *Nomads of the Nomads*, Cole illustrates how he considers them to be perfect examples of nomad pastoralists²¹. When it comes to genealogical structure, however, they differ very little from other bedouin. In this case too, the real unit in which people live is the five generation *faḥḍ* and this is the group which affords protection, shares

¹⁸ E. Marx, *Bedouin of the Negev*, Manchester, 1967. The composition of tribes is discussed on pp. 61-80.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²¹ D.P. Cole, *Nomads of the Nomads: the Al Murrah Bedouin of the Empty Quarter*, Arlington Heights, Illinois, 1975. For the main discussion of lineage, clan and tribe see pp. 82-104.

camel brands and the ownership of wells. As far as possible they migrate together, outsiders can be adopted into the *faḥd*, if they graze together for a long period and if, for example, a poor man (in camels) marries a rich woman, he may assimilate to her *faḥd* and acquire a place in the genealogy. Correspondingly *fuḥūd* which become too large to work together in the sparse grazing of central Arabia may split up. Above the level of the *faḥd* is the intermediary *qabīla* of between four and six *fuḥūd* who are held to share a common ancestor. Seven of these *qabā'il* make up the Al-Murra. The whole tribe is conceived of as having a common ancestor and its members may refer to each other as "*ibn 'ammī*" (my cousin) but in fact the tribe as a whole never meets or works in common. The role of the shaykh is confined to being a mediator between the government and the tribesmen, a channel for subsidies and jobs.

All these examples suggest some common features about bedouin genealogies. The first and most obvious is that most bedouin do not know their genealogy in any detail beyond their own *faḥd* and that, furthermore, they are not particularly concerned about this. The only exception is in the case of shaykhly lineages like the Ša'lān of Ruwāla where the genealogy has a wider political importance and affirms the status of the lineage. In these cases it may go back many generations to the time when the lineage first became important but no attempt is made to link it to the eponymous ancestor of the tribe. There may be individuals who specialise in remembering the genealogy and have a status as experts. Some tribes develop quite complex over-arching macro-genealogies, like the Ruwāla who, when asked, place their subgroups in a family relationship with each other. Other tribes seem to manage without this, perhaps because they are less numerous or less politically active, and many of the small groups described by Jaussen, seem to feel no need to relate their group to a wider bedouin world. None of the tribes seem to have felt it necessary to relate themselves to the founders of the Arab race (apart from the naive attempt of Ḥuwayṭāt to find Ḥuwayṭ a son of Ham). All the examples acknowledge the possibility of creating or altering the genealogy, even at a micro level, but only the Lancasters in the case of the Ruwāla have explored all the implications of this. A further point to note is the role of outsiders, i.e. the government of neighbouring settled areas (and perhaps visiting anthropologists and ethnographers) in giving a role of the shaykhs of the whole tribe and hence to the tribal genealogies.

Bedouin genealogies are practical tools for conducting and explaining

everyday relationships with other bedouin near and far. The tribesmen remember what is useful to them and do not bother with information which has no practical purpose.

It now remains to see how this relates to the vast genealogical compilation of Ibn al-Kalbī. Genealogies were written down for many purposes in early Islam, to explain the poems which commemorate such events as the War of Basūs and the War of Fiḡār or to establish the credentials of some famous personage. Ibn Ishāq's *Sīra (Life of the Prophet)* opens with a genealogy of Muḥammad, tracing his descent from Adam in forty-eight generations²². Many authors used, elaborated or invented genealogies in works which were basically concerned with other subjects.

The compilation of books of genealogy for its own sake seems to have begun after the first success of the Muslim conquests. We have a precise tradition which purports to describe the circumstances under which this occurred²³. The anecdote recounts the attempts of the Caliph 'Umar to ensure the equitable distribution of revenues after the conquests. Al-Walīd b. Hāšim b. al-Muḡīra said to him, "O Commander of the Faithful, I came to Syria and I saw that its rulers had set up a *dīwān* and organised *ḡunds* so set up a *dīwān* and organise *ḡunds*". He agreed with these words and called 'Aqīl b. Abī Ṭalīb Maḥrama b. Nawfal and Ḥubayr b. Muṭ'īm who were among the genealogists (*nussāb*) of Qurayš and told them to write down the names of the people according to their status (*manāzilihim*) so they wrote beginning with the Banū Hāšim, then Abū Bakr and his people and then 'Umar and his people because they were Caliphs. When 'Umar saw it, he said, "I am pleased, by God, with the way you have done it but begin with the relatives of the Prophet, upon whom be peace, with the closest first until you put 'Umar where God put him" (i.e. in his relationship to the Prophet). It would be wrong to put too much weight on this story which may well be apocryphal but it does point out some salient features of the early development of genealogical literature. Firstly it was written, specifically, we are told a bit later in a *daftar* or book. There is no evidence of written genealogies among the modern bedouin. Secondly the inspiration is said, rightly or wrongly, to have come from Byzantine (or possibly Persian) administrative practice. Thirdly, and perhaps most important, it was written down on the instructions of the

²² Ed. F. Wüstenfeld, *Das Leben Muhammads*, Göttingen, 1858-60, p. 3; trans., A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad*, Oxford, 1955, p. 3.

²³ Ṭabarī, *Ta'rīḥ*, ed. M.J. de Goeje *et al.* Leiden, 1879-1901, I, p. 2750.

Caliph to place different tribes people in their proper places rather than by tribesmen anxious to record their own genealogy. Finally it should be noted that the arrangement and order of the genealogies can be altered, in this case to reflect Islamic priorities.

Other genealogists are recorded in Umayyad times. One such was Dağfal b. Ḥanzala al-Šaybānī, called *al-Nassāba*, whom Mu‘āwiya consulted on genealogical matters, but none of these works have survived to give us an impression of their overall scope²⁴.

The *Ğamharat al-nasab* of Hišām b. Muḥammad al-Kalbī is the high point of early Arabic genealogical literature but it is clearly part of a developing tradition and genre. None of these works have come down to us but Caskel has postulated the existence of a *Kitāb nasab Ma‘add wa’l-Yaman al-kabīr* produced in Kūfa during the first quarter of the second century *hiğrī*. He also used other sources who may have produced books like the Ḥiraš b. Ismā‘īl al-‘Iğlī whose information use in his account of the genealogy of Rabī‘a. As often in the early Islamic tradition, it is difficult to tell when we are dealing with a written tradition and when it is a verbal report. We can be reasonably certain, however that by the second century *hiğrī* extensive written genealogies were developed, that Kūfa was the main centre of such studies and that Ibn al-Kalbī collected, edited and arranged this information in the great collection we have today²⁵.

What then distinguishes this written tradition of genealogy from the oral genealogies of the bedouin? Firstly there is of course the sheer size of it; with 35,000 names it is clearly far more extensive than any bedouin genealogy could possibly be. Memories may have been better in those days than they are now but only a written genealogy could even approach that number. Perhaps the most extensive oral genealogy recorded is that of the Bayt Muḥammad, the shaykhly family of Šammar, given by Von Oppenheim²⁶ on the authority of ‘Abd al-Razzāq b. Muḥammad al-Šuyūḥ. This comprises some 110 names in five generations and may represent the effective limit of oral genealogical memory.

The second difference is the comprehensive nature of the written genealogy. Ibn al-Kalbī proposes a macro-genealogy beginning with ‘Adnān for the North Arabs and Qaḥṭān for the South, which will

²⁴ See F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, vol. I, Leiden, 1967.

²⁵ Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 119-21.

²⁶ Von Oppenheim, *op. cit.*, I, p. 154.

embrace all the Arab tribes known to him. As we have seen, the Ruwāla have a macro genealogical scheme which embraces 'Anaza, Šammar and the Banū Šaḥr amongst others, but they are not directly connected to this, nor are they concerned with the genealogies of Šammar and Banū Šaḥr to which they do not themselves belong. Ibn al-Kalbī's magnificent scheme, by contrast every single individual is connected by an unbroken chain to the two fathers of the Arab race, 'Adnān and Qaḥṭān. His work admits of no uncertainty, no duplication and no lacunae. Not only are individuals connected to the main stems in this way but each tribe and sub-tribe finds its appropriate connection so that they can be assigned, for example, to 'Adnān or Qaḥṭān and within those groups to Tamīm or Kinda. No tribes are allowed to escape this structure.

Caskel has shown how these structures have been elaborated in Umayyad times and how this overarching structure has in fact been created to achieve certain ends and to assign tribes to the areas in which they are felt to belong²⁷. Tribes have been united in genealogical-political groups according to the circumstances of Umayyad politics. He shows how Rabī'ā was developed in Baṣra to incorporate Bakr and tribes allied to it, how 'Āmila, Laḥm and Ġudām became "brothers" in southern Palestine and how the victory of Kalb at Marḡ Rāhiṭ in 64/683 led to the incorporation of Šāliḥ and Tanūḥ in Quḍā'a but also, in response, led to the solidarity of Qays under the leadership of Zufar b. al-Ḥārīṭ. Political events created overarching genealogies which had not existed before Islam, or, if they did, had only existed in a very vague fashion, much as they did for the twentieth century Ruwāla²⁸. He also gives examples of how poets assign groups to genealogies and determined what generations they should belong to. This is clearly similar to the "must have been" philosophy by which the Ruwāla arrange their genealogies today.

It remains now to account for the emergence of this tradition of written genealogy in the first two centuries of Islam. Perhaps the most obvious cause was the development of the *dīwān*. It has already been seen from Ṭabarī's account how the setting up and ordering of the *dīwān* meant that everyone had to be assigned to a certain genealogy since this was the section in which they were paid and the money distributed. It was impossible to have small unattached groups, like some

²⁷ Caskel, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 31-5.

of those identified by Jaussens, which had no place in the wider genealogical structure, and everyone had to have a defined place. In theory and appearance the *dīwān* was arranged on genealogical lines, beginning, as we have seen, with the family of the Prophet. In practice many people must have been assigned places in tribes on fairly flimsy grounds and have chosen tribal *nisbas* like post-Ottoman Turks were obliged to choose western style hereditary surnames. Knowing your place in the genealogy could have important financial consequences. As late as the reign of al-Mahdī there was an important case concerning the genealogical status of the family of Ziyād b. Abīhi, half brother of Mu'āwīya. The issue was whether they should be assigned to the prestigious genealogy of Qurayš, to whom their alleged paternal ancestor Abū Sufyān belonged, or the inferior lineage of their known mother, in which case, their names were to be removed from the *dīwān* of Qurayš. Interestingly by this time genealogical knowledge seems to have become very specialist; when the Caliph asked his courtiers who knew anything about the genealogy of Ziyād's family, it emerged that they were all totally ignorant and in the end a member senior member of the 'Abbasid family, Sulaymān b. 'Alī, who had left the court shortly before, had to be prevailed upon to write it all down so that he Caliph would know. Here we see genealogical knowledge as evidence in an important case and how such knowledge had become increasingly specialised and written down²⁹.

The second reason for this development was the growing importance of tribes in the politics of the early Islamic state. As we have seen, twentieth century bedouin know which tribe they belong to and have an idea that they were all distantly related but they never come together as a group on any occasion at all. In times of warfare quite large sections may operate together, though for purposes of tenting and grazing the units are always much smaller (typically the *faḥḍ*) simply because that is the largest group the environment will sustain. There is no reason to think that the position was any different among the pre-Islamic bedouin. The circumstances of the Islamic conquests changed all this. Arabs were settled in towns like Kūfa in their tribal groups and those from small splinters were put together in a single quarter and treated for administrative purposes as if they were a tribe. Thus men of, say, Tamīm would find themselves alongside other Tamīmīs whom they had never ever met before in their nomad existence.

²⁹ Ṭabarī, *Ta'riḥ*, III, pp. 477-82.

Furthermore, when it came to the struggle for control of resources, all these Tamīmīs would expect to work and fight together as a block because their success and even survival depended on it. Equally the power of tribal chiefs was vastly increased by the circumstances of the settlement. We have already seen how the main role of modern tribal chiefs is at the interface between tribes and the government, as channels for money and patronage. This was true in the early Islamic state when the Caliphs used the chiefs in the same way. Furthermore, after the conquests the scale of warfare became much greater, since many more resources were at issue. Larger groups like Qudā'a, Qays and Rabī'a came into being as a result of political struggles and they had to be assigned a place in the genealogy of the Arab tribes. Establishing the place of each tribe and group in the overarching macro-genealogies became of crucial importance.

The nature of *dīwān* and the nature of Umayyad politics both account for the systematisation on a grand-scale which was typical of the Arabic genealogical literature. But we should not underestimate the intellectual interest in its shaping. By the time that Ibn al-Kalbī compiled his *Ġamhara*, genealogy had become a branch of knowledge valued for its own sake, like Arabic grammar or history. Like other branches of knowledge, the early Arabic genealogists demanded names and details. If they were not available, then they had to be "discovered". Like chains of transmitters of *ḥadīth* genealogies had to be complete and could admit of no gaps. Just as the historians of the end of the second century attempted to arrange the *alḥbār* in which early Islamic history was recounted, in an ordered chronological fashion to give it structure and unity, so the genealogist arranged the fragmentary tribal genealogies passed on in poetry and tribal tradition to form a single, satisfying structure.